

# Common Pitfalls & Tips for Good Financial Assistance Applications

September 2008 Workshop





# Background on Financial Assistance Guidelines

- SAG/SRG funding is competitive
  - SAG: \$500k available; \$100k max. award
  - SRG: \$1.5M available; \$400k max. award
- Recent grant rounds have been over-subscribed and otherwise-qualified projects have been denied funding
- Scoring criteria are written to reward projects that are well thought out and the timing is “right”
  - Details reflected in the application
  - Framework (\$ and other resources) in place to complete redevelopment
- The thoughtfulness behind, content and quality of your application counts



# Background on Financial Assistance Guidelines

## Breakdown of 275 Possible Points:

1. Project Benefits (200 total possible points)
  - Economic Development Potential (60)
  - Community Development/Greenspace (50)
  - Feasibility of Project Success/Resources Leveraged (40)
  - Sustainability/Environmental Benefit/Infrastructure Reuse (35)
  - Welfare & Public Health (15)
- Community Engagement & Local Support for Project (50 total possible points)
  - Project-specific neighborhood comment & input (30)
  - Coordinated Local Brownfields Efforts (20)
- Objective Criteria (25 total possible points)
  - Geographic Distribution of Grant \$ (20)
  - CLEAN Community Designation (5)



# General Observations About Applications

## Main Issues:

- Lack of sufficient detail in application to allocate points to scoring criteria
- Over-generalized or unsubstantiated statements specifically on:
  - projected investment
  - community support
  - marketability of the site
  - redevelopment plans
- Redundancy within the same application (or across applications if multiple applications are submitted by the same consultant)



# Primary Areas of Application Weakness

## Failure to:

- put plans for the site into context with respect to existing community development plans or Comprehensive Plan for the community, if one exists
- quantify planned (or already-incurred) local or private investment in the site, if any
- discuss the project in a public forum and receive input/feedback on plans to apply for funding and/or on the redevelopment plans
- provide any detail on nature or substance of public comments received (e.g., support/criticism of plans)



# Common Reasons for Application Success

- All necessary information to assess threshold eligibility is included within the application and there are no lingering eligibility issues (e.g., involvement of liable party)
- Evident that community has been involved in the application and project planning process
- Redevelopment plans explicitly explained; timing is “right”
- Evident that ample time was taken to prepare application because questions are thoroughly addressed & information provided in the application is tied to the scoring criteria
- Supporting documentation submitted with application, not after the application deadline



# Recommended Application Tips

- **Don't assume reviewers know anything about your project.** If in doubt about whether or not to include information (e.g., about stakeholders, leveraged funds, site history) in an application, include it
  - previous conversations or meetings about the site may not be recalled during the review process
- **Thoroughly read the guidelines (and scoring criteria therein) *prior to* applying to understand what gets evaluated to ensure threshold criteria are satisfied**
  - We prefer not to award projects with contingencies if at all possible (e.g., if site ownership has to change before the grant agreement can be executed)



# Recommended Application Tips

- **Choose a good consultant if you're going to outsource preparation of your application and thoroughly review what is drafted before you it is submitted on your behalf**
  - Know and get what you are paying for!
- **Apply when the site is really ready to be addressed**
  - Chance of the project's success should not be too speculative from the point of community investment/support or planned future use/redevelopment
- **Avoid speculative language or general conclusory statements with no substantiation** (e.g., "private sector investment *could* be significant" or "inquiries by interested users continue") = a red flag for reviewers
  - With no basis for the statement or additional information, no points will be allocated





# Recommended Application Tips

- **Don't be hasty in completing the application**
  - It is obvious to reviewers when not much time and attention is paid to completing the application
  - Be careful about updating and re-submitting old applications; outdated information stands out and weakens the application; be sure updates are made where appropriate
- **Don't let the application form itself limit the information you provide**
  - The “additional information” box at the end of each section of the application is there for a reason
- **Avoid submitting supporting documentation after the deadline**
  - Doing so suggests that the application was prepared at the last minute and that little forethought was put into the overall process



## Recommended Application Tips

- **The sections on economic and community development potential for the site are allocated the most points in the scoring criteria**
  - Time is best spent providing detail in the answers to those parts of the application that correspond to those factors (e.g., planned reuse, marketability of the site, overall timeline for project redevelopment and completion, etc...)
- **Keep in mind that our Program goal is to average \$10 in investment for every \$1 we invest**
  - Projected investment is a critical factor when we score applications and can be an indicator of likelihood of a project's success



GOOD LUCK!